

"I'm Not a Militant Feminist": Exploring Feminist Identities and Feminist Hesitations in the Contemporary Academy

Michelle Webber, Brock University, focuses her research on women and higher education, feminist pedagogy and women's studies.

Abstract

Drawing on interviews with twenty-one university women (students, teaching assistants and faculty), I show how and to what extent university women's studies classrooms are a route to feminism. Some of the women in this study are reluctant to call themselves feminists and operate with a largely personalized version of what constitutes feminism. But rather than see this as a failure of feminism as a social movement, I argue that it is useful to attempt to see the positive effects of an individualist approach to feminism operating at the micropolitical level of agency.

Résumé

En se basant sur vingt et une entrevues de femmes universitaires (étudiantes, aide-enseignantes et le corps enseignant), je démontre comment et jusqu'à quel point les classes universitaires d'études des femmes sont la voie vers le féminisme. Certaines des femmes qui ont participé à cette sont réticentes à s'appeler féministes et opèrent avec une version grandement personnalisée de ce qui constitue le féminisme. Plutôt que de voir ceci comme un échec du mouvement féministe et social, je soutiens qu'il est utile d'essayer de voir les effets positifs d'une approche individualiste au féminisme qui opère au niveau micro-politique de l'agence.

Introduction

The university is an integral site for the construction of identities and subject formation for students (Britton and Baxter 1999). Feminist identities are not always comfortable ones. There are often hesitations about calling oneself a feminist. People are uncomfortable with assumptions about "militant" feminists, or "angry" feminists or feminists who are "too outrageous." This article delves into a variety of contemporary feminisms in one Canadian university. Interviews with faculty, teaching assistants and students involved in women's studies reveal the on-goingness of identifying as a feminist and how becoming a feminist is a socially mediated process. One's identity is not pre-determined; rather "identities are always fluctuating and contextually-bound" (Ropers-Huilman 1997, 332).

The process of identifying with feminism is explored through an examination of the university as a site for introducing people to feminism. Drawing on interviews with twenty-one university women, I show how and to what extent university women studies classrooms are a route to feminism. I also document participants' expressions of feminist hesitations and their personal understandings of the meaning of feminism. The women in this study came to feminism largely via the academy, yet, interestingly, are reluctant to call themselves feminists and operate with a largely personalized version of what constitutes feminism. But rather than see this as a failure of feminism as a social movement, I argue that it is useful to attempt to see the positive effects of an individualist approach to feminism operating at the micropolitical level of agency.

The Study

This article draws from a larger study that investigates the social organization of feminist approaches to teaching through the perspectives of

faculty, teaching assistants and students (Webber 2005a). The larger project asks to what extent idealistic teaching, framed as feminist, is possible in a university that is regulated by masculinist principles. I draw on semi-structured interviews with twenty-one women: eight faculty, five teaching assistants and eight students. All of the interviewees identify as white. Using a semi-structured approach allowed for a dialogue between the interviewees and me to occur during the interviews. Qualitative data-gathering such as the interview approach used in this project is widely used by feminist scholars (Reinharz 1992). The semi-structured approach provided interviewees with opportunities to introduce areas of conversation of interest to them that I did not plan, nor think, to pursue.

The women are all from one university that is primarily focussed on undergraduate teaching in a medium-sized urban setting in Ontario, Canada. The women's studies programme in this university was created just over a decade ago. The participating faculty are: one sessional instructor (Sue Ann); three contractually limited term appointments (lecturers: Tina and Bettina; assistant professor: Jordan); two tenured associate professors (Ilana and Rosemary); and two tenured full professors (Cara and Paula). The women faculty in this project represent a blend across the academic ranks. The teaching assistants are: Donna, Dale, Sybil, Julia and Arja. The students are: Sarah, Veronica, Rebecca, Melissa, Heather, Alicia, Connie and Charlene.

While the larger project's focus is not on feminist identities per se, I was intrigued that issues of identity and feminist identities kept recurring in the interview transcripts. Some of my data are limited in this area, as I did not probe as much as I could have on elements of identity during the interviews. The material presented below is drawn from questions in the interviews which focus upon the participants' backgrounds in women's studies, their definitions of feminism and whether or not they self-identify as feminists.

University Exposure to Feminism

The women I interviewed addressed many influences on their journeys to identifying as feminists or understanding their world view as feminist or something akin to feminism. The university setting

appears to be the key site by far for exposing individuals to feminist ideas and principles and the development of women's feminist identities. While other exposures to feminism exist, namely family, family friends, and work colleagues, the focus of this paper is on the university site. Eleven of the women (Tina, Jordan, Bettina, Julia, Connie, Veronica, Cara, Rosemary, Sue Ann, Ilana and Alicia) spoke of having particular ideas or beliefs before beginning their studies and that as a result of the university, they are now able to understand themselves as being feminist.

For the current cohort of both teaching assistants and students, formal courses at the university level gave the women the tools to interpret their ideas as being feminist in character. As in Jackson's (2000) findings, students discovered women's studies accidentally. In Alicia's case, her discovery of women's studies was through a cross-listed psychology of women course. She relays that, "it was like the lights went on. I'm not the only stupid person or idiot, no I'm not the only one saying this stuff and a lot of stuff in that course made sense." Several of the participants make reference to the light bulb phenomenon. As Anderson and Williams (2001) argue, "we all retrospectively make sense of our changing identities....Past and present experiences are given meaning and a context which illuminates current identity conflicts and their resolution" (4).

Rosemary, a faculty member, also describes her first connection with feminist literature at the university level: "I had my own personal beliefs but nothing to really back them up and I got into this literature and just thought I had found heaven here, all these radical women speaking out and resisting the status quo." Rosemary entered academia after an already successful career in another profession. By the time she began her studies, there were courses incorporating feminist perspectives.

Cara and Paula were part of the cohort of pioneering feminist women in the academy who introduced feminism to their students, created feminist courses and founded women's studies programmes. As Lenton (1990, 66) notes, prior to 1970 there were "no feminist courses or resources for curriculum development in Canadian universities and few colleagues could share the burden of course development." Both Bird's (2004) research on the development of women's studies in Canada, the United

Kingdom and the United States and Crowley's (1999) global account of women's studies' development echo Lenton's work. As Crowley writes, "feminist scholarship, although it hadn't dismantled the master's house, had certainly nailed its theses to the door and inspired a feminist reformation" (138). Like the pioneering women in Lenton's research, Cara was motivated to help develop the programme by her involvement in the feminist movement. She was actually one of the women who worked on the proposal for the women's studies programme at the research site.

Similar to findings in Montgomery and Collete's (2001) research that explores how women's studies courses impact students' lives, Connie describes her experience in women's studies courses as helping her become more assertive: "I'm not a risk taker and even though I felt that some issues in my personal life should have been addressed, I really didn't know how to do it until I took some Women's Studies courses. And then I was able to make a stand for myself."

Veronica, a student, resembles the students in Jackson's (2000) research who found women's studies as being personally relevant to their lives. Veronica positions her experience at university as pivotal in making connections to the oppression of women she witnessed as a worker in a women's rehabilitation centre. Feminist material in her university classes helped to deepen her feminist commitment: "You hear about feminists talk about the 'ah ha'...I had that experience when I got to school...the more I read and the more I study and the more I look into feminist theory and research, the deeper that sort of 'ah ha' becomes, and the more I realize I am so very much at home within the feminist framework." The students, teaching assistants and younger faculty in this project enjoy a distinctly different university than did the senior faculty members. As we see from Rosemary's experience, being exposed to feminism at university is not just related to one's age; rather, one's experience at university is also reflective of the timing of one's student journey.

Formal classes are not the only aspect of university life that exposes someone to feminism. One faculty member, Ilana, remembers several areas of her university time as influential in the development of her feminist identity. Ilana recalls a young junior professor who taught in her area of interest and

became pregnant during Ilana's last school year. The light bulb went on for Ilana and she remembers thinking "Oh, not only can you be a woman professor, but you can be pregnant and a woman professor." Additionally, Ilana's experience in graduate school in a campus feminist caucus solidified some of her longstanding thoughts about gender and feminism.

Women's studies programs, courses cross-listed with women's studies, and feminist caucuses are important sites for introducing individuals to feminism and feminist thinking as well as the actions of individual feminist faculty members. These academic spaces encourage students to understand how gender acts as an organizing principle in their lives. What is interesting to note is the generational effect being witnessed in this project. For several of the older women participants, formal courses and programmes in women's studies were not available. The senior women faculty in this project represent the generation of women faculty who created the feminist courses and women's studies programmes that my participants identify as being influential in the development of their feminist identities. The students and teaching assistants and even the younger faculty members are in a position to take the availability of women's studies in the academy for granted precisely because of second-wave feminist activism.

Calling Oneself a Feminist

The women's accounts of when they were exposed to feminism and how they came to call themselves feminist reveal that there is a processual character to accepting one's identity as feminist. Further, it is evident that the process is mediated socially. The processual nature of identifying as feminist appears in the language the women use to describe their experiences of coming to call themselves feminists. There are moments in the interviews during which the women tell stories of their lives, focusing on their experiences of dealing with marginalization or harassment and thinking about feminism. For some, the process is quick or takes on the appearance of never really happening and for others the process seems long, after a "lifetime of fighting" (Veronica). For some feminists, the process of identification is both quick and long-lasting.

The following quotations are an example of the type of historical narrative through which a

student describes her experiences that led toward being a feminist. These quotations provide a telling example of the complexity of the process of coming to feminism. We also see how the second wave feminist mantra of the "personal is political" is still relevant. The notion of the personal as political is integral in illuminating connections between people's private experiences and public issues (Stuart 1990).

"Experientially, though, I'm a feminist because I have personally run into incredible discrimination, my whole life has been organized around fighting, being devalued because I'm a woman, it showed up in family life...and then in the work force, you know, continually," (Veronica). Veronica then goes on to tell of being sexually harassed and assaulted: "I mean, sexual harassment, which was just second nature for me... If you have a male boss, he's gonna grope you, and you better get used to it, and figure out how you're gonna deal with it...and again sexual assault, you know, living in a world where you feel like you're prey, continually." She further describes her experiences as an "outspoken" woman in a religious college: "The college I went to is exceptionally patriarchal...[it] had very prescribed roles for women...Because I was outspoken and would speak up and participate, it was a threat, you know...it was problematic for me, and I really internalized the stress that men were feeling around me, and that meant men professors and otherwise."

Veronica then reveals how one of her professors analysed her situation: "[he said], 'you know what, it's not about you, it's about them, men who are secure in their masculinity are not threatened by women who are assertive and smart and beautiful and intelligent'...'you need to be yourself.'" Veronica talks about realizing how oppressed she was and how oppressive it was to be a woman. She describes how she spent most of her life thinking she "wasn't woman enough." She thought that there was something wrong with her femininity because she was not wearing dresses, she spoke loudly and she could argue. Veronica discusses her realization finally that being feminine is who she is and that this is just fine for her, "I'm feminine by virtue of the fact that I just am, and that whatever I do is feminine because I'm doing it and I'm a woman who does it. And that was a real revelation to me."

While Veronica would not describe herself as

a "feminist activist," she is nonetheless utilizing an interpretive framework that draws on feminism (Budgeon 2001). She is engaging in social change at the micropolitical level within her daily life. Veronica relays how her university experience, which exposed her to feminist literature, represented a turning point in her life. She describes herself as being at home within a feminist framework, a feminist community. As this woman tells it, the process of coming to call herself a feminist involved years of harassment and marginalization in her daily life because she is a woman. The process of becoming a feminist for Veronica took years. Veronica was continually experiencing the implicit underpinnings of gender but was unable to untangle her multiple experiences and see them as being socially coordinated until she read feminist literature which provided a language for her lived actuality.

Two students, Melissa and Heather, both describe themselves as becoming feminists "very gradually." Melissa recalls, "I'm going to be 40 and I think already when I was in my mid-20s this happened." Heather states, "I think I would definitely call myself a feminist, yes, but it takes a long time to get to this point."

Two other students, Connie and Alicia, describe becoming feminists rather quickly, after taking one women's studies course at university. Alicia uses a phrase that is repeated through several of the participants' interviews. "I took it and all of a sudden it was like the lights went on" (Alicia). Connie remembers signing up for a course in her home discipline that was cross-listed with women's studies and states, "I was hooked. I changed my mind about [majoring in] history and decided I was going to declare myself a women's studies major." Again, we see the importance of timing as a student at university. Who knows whether Connie and Alicia, or others, would have found feminism without the pioneering efforts of other feminist women in the academy?

Donna and Rebecca consider themselves to have been feminists for as long as they can remember. What is interesting about Donna's account is how she tried what she calls "the other life" and came back to feminism. She begins by recalling her experience in high school: "It was not that I don't like boys, because I do, but I enjoyed sports, I

enjoyed going to the art gallery...It was more my mind that entertained me as opposed to things like getting all dolled up and going out on a date." Donna then describes her college experience:

All of my girlfriends were engaged and getting married, I made a conscious decision, and I remember it, to pass through that [cultural] wall and I did and so on the other side I had to get married - make cookies from scratch...cooking for my husband, one of his mother's favourite recipes...You know I did all of that and it didn't suit me, I wasn't happy. So I did it for many, many years and just gradually shifted back to just being myself, and if that means being called a feminist and living outside the mainstream, then so be it.

The above examples demonstrate the processual aspects of coming to call oneself a feminist. The quotations also show that the pathways to becoming a feminist are quite varied, socially mediated and never firm and fixed (Budgeon 2001; Ropers-Huilman 1997). Further, the identity is never firm and fixed but rather can fluctuate over time and context. The women relay a multitude of aspects of their lives which led them to feminism, from grade school and friends to college experiences, professors and courses. One's development as a feminist is also a socially mediated process. Becoming a feminist does not happen in isolation from one's social world. It is precisely the very social situations, often oppressive, that women are engaged in that lead women to discover a language or perspective that is capable of explaining to them how their world is put together.

Feminist Hesitations

While these women describe themselves as feminists, there are hesitations about adopting this label or identity. There is a perpetual concern about being considered too radical or too strident or too "feminist." As Letherby and Shiels (2001) point out, there are "constraints on the expression of a feminist identity" (126). In their UK study, Letherby and Marchbank (2001) note that many women's studies students have heard disparaging comments about their participation in women's studies such as "all women's

studies students hate men," "all women's studies students are lesbians" and women's studies as a program is a "Mickey Mouse degree with little academic status" (589). People are reluctant to publicly claim a socially disavowed identity (Zucker 2004). In this project, five women students and two women limited term faculty members made feminist "hesitation statements" in the interviews.

Julia's (teaching assistant) response to being asked if she is a feminist is "yes and no." Her hesitation is around other people's views of feminists: "I guess I'm not [feminist] because stereotypically people tend to think that feminists only deal with women, that they are only women, and that they don't care about men and that they are all man haters, and they're all lesbians and blah, blah. I'm not like that."

Other responses refer to taking action as defining feminism. For example, Donna states "I've never done it in an outrageous manner." She then describes what she calls her "quiet approach" of questioning and "not protesting anything." Connie shares: "I'm not a militant feminist. I don't suppose I would march down Main Street with a banner, but I would call myself a feminist in terms of that I expect to have my views listened to without someone saying I'm emotional or I'm loud or that I am not making sense."

Heather's hesitation is about not wanting to come across in class as an "angry feminist": "...or even worse, like you'll hear people say the 'femi-nazis,' you don't want to be called that...I just don't like the labels...it's a lot to do with tone too, not sounding really angry."

Tina, Alicia, Bettina and Donna all state that they hesitate to some extent to use the label of feminist. For Donna it is a concern about there being a necessary link between feminism and political cognizance. "I don't like the idea, you know, [that] there's an automatic link, like in order to be politically aware, you run this risk of being labelled a feminist."

The others who hesitate to use the feminist label are oriented more toward not wanting to be likened to the "radicals." One faculty member, Bettina, remembers resisting taking on a feminist identity because of what she considers to be extreme behaviour of some of her undergraduate classmates:

Bettina: A lot of people at the time I felt were very extreme, you know, so it was kind of an interest in the ideas but sort of holding back and saying "well I'm not that sort of feminist," like the need to make that kind of distinction.

Interviewer: What would be extreme?

Bettina: I remember someone standing up in a lecture at the beginning, saying something along the lines of "who here's been victimized by men?" Like this, "let's all get up in solidarity" and, you know, "put our cards on the table" and say, you know, "men are bad" or something along those lines.

For Alicia it is a case of "one bad apple ruins it for everyone else." She stays away from the word "feminist" because "it has so many bad connotations."

One faculty member, Tina, noted that she hesitates to use the word "feminist" to describe herself while teaching for fear of the students' reactions. She talks about being careful to manage her identity in the class because as soon as the "f" word enters the teaching process, "Then there's skepticism about who you are, how strident are you? What are you saying? Having babies is bad, or traditional roles is bad or what's bad about that and how has your life gone and, you know?"

As a faculty member on a limited term appointment, Tina is not particularly secure in her university post. The materiality of her position organizes how she approaches teaching feminist content (Webber 2005b).

Griffin (1989) argues that the statement, "I'm not a feminist but...", is a strategy for speaking feminism without identifying with it personally. Skeggs (1997) suggests that not identifying with feminism may reflect a lack of comfort with being labelled as a feminist. Further, non-identification may be a sign of an inability to locate one's persona as feminist because feminism as a category is confusing and not clearly delineated. Budgeon (2001) echoes this interpretation and states that when attempting to answer the question "what is feminism" is so difficult, it is not surprising that young women do not identify themselves as feminist. While Budgeon is referring to "young women," the data for this project demonstrate

that this phenomenon is not limited to young women but rather may be reflective of the temporal aspect of feminist ideals and images (McNay 2000). Budgeon (2001) argues that we need to pay closer attention to issues of age-based differences, as they are an underdeveloped area of research.

Several authors take up the temporal aspect of feminism and feminist ideals. Kitzinger (1995) distinguishes between "victim feminism," which is linked to the past and "power feminism" as a current feminist form. Crowley (1999) situates the 1970s as a period of collectivist feminism. Harris (2001) takes us through several of Kitzinger's (1995) constructions, including the power feminists and victim feminists, as well as "girl-powered do-it-yourselfers" and the "third wave" feminists.

The women in this project who made the feminist hesitation statements demonstrate a difference between the available feminist discourses of the second wave (one identified as more publicly politically active) and current feminist discourse (whether they be considered third-wave (Harris 2001) or post-feminist (Budgeon 2001)). As we will see in the next section, the women are still espousing viewpoints that can be easily identified as feminist or understood as being based on a feminist framework.

Jenkins (1996, cited in Anderson & Williams 2001, 1) argues that "in order to claim an identity, for it to be more than simply an aspiration, it has to be endorsed and validated by others." Currently, there is certainly a "culture of dismissal of feminist ideas" (Letherby & Shiels 2001, 126). Collins (1990, cited in Anderson & Williams 2001) refers to people with social identities which have historically been excluded from the very institutions they are now part of as "outsiders within" (2). Claiming a feminist identity seems to make one an outsider within. Using the insights of Bourdieu (2001), I suggest that these feminist hesitations are reflective of the ingrained nature of an unequal gender order, a masculine domination. Some feminists may find themselves uneasy participants in the academy and wider society. It is important to remember that for others, feminism has provided a reference and collegial network to draw on in the university.

What may be more surprising is that the women in this study who do identify as feminists nevertheless express so many reservations. What

follows is the women participants' attempts to answer the question, "what is feminism?"

Feminism is...

It is interesting that such feminist hesitations continue to exist, even when women have clearly chosen to pursue women's studies. Much of the phenomenon surely stems from not wanting to appear to be living up to the negative popular cultural images of feminists. Common images portray feminists as "earthy, sprout-eating lesbians" (Thomas 2001, 16), "bra-burning, dungaree-clad haridans" (Stuart 1990, 29) or as "feminazi[s]" (Rogers & Garrett 2002, 108). The ignorance embedded in the representation of feminists is quite comical (Thomas 2001). Thomas writes about her experience of being a women's studies major and dealing with the misconceptions of people regarding women's studies as an academic discipline and the wrong assumption that women's studies is equivalent to "basket weaving." One student, Heather, talked of being hesitant to tell people that she is majoring in women's studies because she does not want to deal with the laughter or the questions such as "what can you do with a degree in women's studies?" This leads me to wonder what feminism represents to these women. There is an obvious commitment on their part to some version of feminism, but what does it look like?

I begin this section with Ilana's story of what feminism is not:

So, there was one, wife of a cousin, and as a young girl, stories filtered back about this woman. I knew her and she was the feminist, but she had married and the marriage broke up. The story that I got as a child was that it broke up because of her feminism. It had not been a good thing, just as I had perceived that feminism was a bad thing because it broke up marriages and, and so I had that story.

The other "mistaken" belief that Ilana held was not altered until her graduate school days when her friends invited her to join the feminist caucus.

I do remember saying "How can you really be a feminist and be in love with a man?"

because many of them were in relationships with men and they all kind of rounded on me and...the gist of it [was] like "don't be so silly" but I remember feeling at the time, it's like, "well if you're going to do this, you have to do this whole hog, like what's the point?" You can't be this kind of hypocritical, and I guess that's what made me hesitate all the way along.

Ilana's understanding of feminism as inherently anti-men seems to be based on an understanding of patriarchy of the 1970s: "if women wished to occupy the centre of the stage, it was men and the power that men exercise that had to be displaced" (Bird 2004, 53). Ilana reveals how the members of the feminist caucus changed her outlook on love and men: "And I don't know why I had this idea but I did but they set me straight. They basically said 'We're all in love with various men, it's okay' but obviously I had felt like I couldn't be a real feminist, if I wasn't, I don't know where I got that from. So they set me straight, it turned out to be great."

Similar to several studies (Budgeon 2001; Hughes 2005; Kitzinger 1995), many of the women's formulations around feminism stem from a liberal perspective of equality and what feminism does for them personally:

Feminism is being able to stand up for yourself and maybe stand up for other people who can't stand up for themselves. (Heather)

I expect to have my views listened to without someone saying I'm emotional or I'm loud or that I am not making sense. I'd like my views to be listened to and if you want a disagreement with me, that's fine, but don't make my personality part of why you disagree with me. (Connie)

Notions of equality are apparent in the talk of the interviewees: "I just truly believe that women deserve an equal place and equal opportunities with men" (Rosemary). One student mentions sexism explicitly in her definition of feminism: "Somebody who is aware of sexism and how that sexism works to

oppress women or put them in a different place than men" (Sarah). Melissa, a student, is the only participant who overtly addresses her feminism as praxis:

It's a theoretical perspective, it's a way of living my life...but then the praxis thing I think is very important to me. We're constantly concerned in our family about gendered divisions of labour, child care issues, access to work, so within that family unit we're trying to live atypically gendered lives. We're trying to make this more equitable and what we teach our daughter and the way we raise our daughter. But then there's also personal things about me, I'm conscious about how I live in my body, how I behave in ways that disrupt mainstream notions of what femininity is. I see my feminism as very multi-dimensional.

Melissa is also by far the most reflexive participant in terms of what feminism means to her.

The women interviewed in this study want to practice a personal feminism. They are concerned about equity in their own lives and the lives of their families, but none speak of wanting to extend their own praxis beyond this boundary. So, yes, the personal is political, but some might ask "did feminism fail?" Is this gap an indication of a failure of feminism as a larger social movement? Rather than seeing this as a failure of feminism, we can see how these women exercise agency in their everyday lives. If we look at the micropolitical level, these women are negotiating difficult situations with a combination of individualism and feminist principles (Budgeon 2001). How these women understand their lives is informed by second-wave feminism. They use an interpretive framework based on second-wave feminism to understand how gender inequality works and then utilize such a framework to make changes in their own lives (asserting rights, negotiating harassment, etcetera).

Conclusions

It is clear from the data that even though numerous sites introduce people to feminism, women's studies, "the academic arm of the women's

movement," remains a pivotal introductory space. The women's studies classroom, for these women, was personally liberating and empowering. It was in these spaces that the women felt they could express themselves and realize that they were not "crazy" or isolated in their thinking about how the world works. Further, the university is an important setting for the construction of identities and subject formation for students (Britton & Baxter 1999).

Feminism, or the development of a feminist identity, is a social process. It is also evident that there is a temporal or processual nature to calling oneself a feminist; becoming a feminist is something that happens over time. Further, as detailed above, a feminist identity is not always a comfortable one. Several of the women made hesitation statements in their interviews. The women shared how they do not wish to be linked with "militant" feminists, or "angry" feminists or feminists who are "too strident."

Within the definitions that some of the participants provided of feminism is a concern for equity on a societal level, but many of the respondents focussed on how feminism might impact on themselves as individuals. Perhaps this relatively narrow focus is a reflection of the difficulty we have in demonstrating how the level of social structure fits into and orders our everyday lives. But we should not lose sight of the fact that women's studies offers students, teaching assistants and faculty an opportunity to challenge the most egregious effects of a masculinist culture, both within the university and beyond. And, what women introduced to, and made more sympathetic to, feminism do with this new knowledge once they leave the academy may turn out to be more expansive. Overall, the data suggest that the women's studies classroom remains an important pedagogical tool and a site for the development of a feminist agency that may not be available for these women from other sources.

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Feminism in Nova Scotia: Women's Groups, 1990-2004

Naomi Black is Professor Emerita of Political Science and Women's Studies at York University and Adjunct Professor of Women's Studies at Mount Saint Vincent University. Her most recent publication is *Virginia Woolf as Feminist* (2004).

Abstract

This study compares audits of Nova Scotian women's groups in the years 1990 and 2004 to argue that such groups, which sustain feminism, have increased in number although there have been changes in structures and in respect to salient issues.

Résumé

Cette étude compare des vérifications faites sur des groupes de femmes néo-écossaises en 1990 et en 2004 pour prouver que de tels groupes, qui supportent le féminisme ont augmenté en nombre, quoiqu'il y ait eu des changements dans les structures et à l'égard des questions saillantes.

"Whatever happened to the ideals of feminism?" asked the *Globe and Mail's* television critic, John Doyle, in March 2005. "Today," he wrote, "most young women think about personal empowerment, not the politics of battles about abortion rights, equal pay and access to information about their own bodies." Older women, he suggested, put their energy into struggles with the continuing realities of a hostile and exclusionary corporate culture.¹ Written for International Women's Day, his article was part of the current and recurrent dirge for feminism. All that is left, we are told, is a new "third wave" of younger women who valorize "girly" styles and aggressive sexuality, turn for models to television superheroines like *Buffy the Vampire-Killer*, and find women's groups passé.²

We disagree, for we believe that feminism has definitely not receded into the depths whence it came. And this study of women's groups in Nova Scotia will show as much. In it, we provide a listing